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## *Third Time's a Charm*

### *News From Chuck Lesnick*

June 13, 2008

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After six weeks of intense budget hearings and fund negotiations which included holding two special meetings, the City Council finally approved an \$892.8 million spending plan by a 6-1 vote Tuesday night.

In this tough fiscal climate, we were lucky to approve a budget that lowered property taxes one percentage point less (7.5%) than proposed by Mayor Amicone (8.5%). We also put a hiring freeze in place on all nonessential jobs and eliminated dozens of positions from the Mayor's original spending plan. This includes \$900,000 in non-unionized management positions in 2008-09 and \$1.6 million in non-personnel related cuts.

Our budget allows for \$1.5 million more than originally proposed in the \$481.6 million set aside for school spending. Municipal expenses are \$411.2 million.

We were able to keep money in the fund balance, an important reserve, as economic uncertainty is affecting not

only our revenue projections, but also those of the state.

#### Collins Cuts Ribbon at Ceremony



Yesterday's ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new Hudson Park Apartments on 1 Alexander Street, Yonkers is just one example of Downtown development that was only made possible through the developer, [Collins Enterprises, LLC](#), receiving brownfields tax credits.

Brownfields are abandoned or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or

redevelopment is complicated by concentrations of environmental contaminants such as hazardous waste or pollution and has the potential to be reused once it is cleaned up.

Tax credits are given to developers willing to build on these sites as incentive for development in downtown areas as opposed to building on pristine open space such as farmland and other undeveloped properties.

There's no clearer example of how environmental protection and economic development can go hand in hand. Both are vital for the future well-being of our state and for us here in Yonkers.

There is one problem. In 2003, the state enacted a groundbreaking brownfields law. However, in the years since its implementation, some of its programs are encumbered by structural flaws that either restrain redevelopment or fund projects that do not represent the best use of limited tax dollars.

I am asking you to click [here](#) on the League of Conservation Voters website to tell Albany to "green up" its brownfields program to maintain this important ecological balance.

#### Education News From Albany



We had a very productive meeting in Albany last week talking with Deputy Secretary for Education Dr. Manuel Rivera (left) about the challenges facing Yonkers regarding the



education aid formula and our capital reimbursement rate.

Having worked as the superintendent of the Rochester City School District before entering state government, Dr. Rivera seems to understand the needs of a big city-dependent school district such as Yonkers.

He opened the meeting, attended by Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senator Jeff Klein, Assemblyman Mike Spano, Yonkers Schools Superintendent Bernard Pierorazio, Deputy Mayor Bill Regan, Councilmember Pat McDow and me by declaring that the formula is negotiable and needs to be fixed.

He suggested the Yonkers approach the problem by working together with the other Big 4 dependent school districts (Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo and Albany) on readdressing the formula. He recognized that Yonkers has high needs and that we have already trimmed our central administration budget.

Dr. Rivera further stated that the resolution Mayor Amicone proposed before the City Council last week was not only unnecessary but in fact could be counterproductive to the process. The Council Democrats intend to keep this resolution in committee as we work through the process with the state.

He pledged that Governor Paterson would start holding internal policy meetings this summer well in advance of his budget presentation scheduled for January, 2009.

We also spoke about a number of specific fixes for Yonkers including mixed use capital education funding bills that will positively impact the city.

There's more to come as we roll up our sleeves and hope to settle this once and for all.

### Council Supports County-Wide Reval

The last time Yonkers did it was in 1954. Harrison did it last in 1938 and Mt. Vernon hasn't done it since the Civil War.

We're talking property tax revaluations--an issue I have been addressing and working on with the Westchester Municipal Officials Association and the Westchester County Association over the last year. And one that one that has been called into question since 1940 when Westchester County's Executive, William T. Bleakley, urged the County Board of Supervisors to undertake a county-wide assessment to balance the County's system of property valuation.

History repeated itself this year when the County announced wide-swinging property tax rates again this year. This time, Yonkers got hit with a 23.64% property tax increase whereas other municipalities such as Mt. Pleasant saw decreases in their tax bills.





While the places and the percentages change yearly, the fact remains the same. Westchester County has an unfair system-- and it needs to change.

In May, the Yonkers City Council voted unanimously to pass a [resolution](#) calling for a county-wide reassessment of all property. As the County's largest city, Yonkers hopes to take the lead on changing the system while addressing provisions for those with fixed incomes or incomes under a specific threshold.

We hope that other municipalities take our lead, urging their leaders to call on the County to update their tax rolls in fairness to all.

If you have any questions, please contact me by clicking on my email address [here](#).

#### Monday Meeting: Save the Glenwood Power Station



I urge everyone to attend a very important Townhall Meeting on the fate of the Glenwood/Yonkers Power Station at 7:00 p.m. **Monday, June 16** at the Nepperhan Community Center on 342 Warburton Ave., sponsored by the office of Councilwoman Patricia McDow.

As the father of two in Yonkers, I share the outrage and concern about alleged gang activity taking place at the vacant Glenwood Power Station.

Since then, we have been assured that new safety and security measures are in place by owner Ken Capolino; Commissioner of Buildings, John Meyer; and Police Commissioner Edmund Hartnett. This is good news for everyone.

Still, some in the community are demanding immediate destruction of the building, citing moral impasse. They have taken to calling the historical structure The Gates of Hell. Many more refer to it as the Gates of Hope, seeing endless possibilities for a developer to save the structure through adaptive reuse and turn it into something spectacular.

Demolishing the building will not solve the problem, it will only create new ones. Tearing it down will not only be a much more expensive process than rebuilding it, but will take longer to solve the problem of an empty eyesore. Additionally, it will wipe out a key part of Yonkers history, have a major impact on the environment and on Yonkers carbon footprint, and reduce our potential tax base and appeal.

When the [Preservation League of New York](#) recognized its historical significance in January by putting it on an emergency list of the Empire State's most threatened and endangered historic sites, called Seven to Save, people began to take more notice. Now that the building



is for sale again, several well-known developers have expressed interest in rebuilding the site.

It would not be the first time that a vacant power station, building or even a neighborhood has been turned around. Developer Bill Struever took on a similar restoration project in Baltimore, Maryland where he transformed an [historic power plant](#) into an incredible destination with office, retail and residential spaces, including a Barnes and Noble anchor store. This not only saved the City of Baltimore literally hundreds of thousands of dollars in tear down costs, but it also created hundreds of jobs and a cultural hub while preserving a piece of their city's historic past.

I envision something along those lines as the most effective and efficient way to deal with the building. Please join me in speaking out on this issue.

### New Fire Equipment

The Yonkers Fire Department (YFD) received two new rigs this month including a state-of-the-art Mobile Command Center that coordinates inter-agency responses/communications efforts during large scale emergencies and a mobile "Fireblast" Training Simulator that places firefighters in "live burn" scenarios during training sessions.



While the YFD has the second-fastest response time rating among major

departments in the United States, Fire Commissioner Tony Pagano warned against inadequate communications systems that were one of the major problems encountered by emergency workers during 9/11.

The Mobile Command Center will help enable them to coordinate multi-agency, real time satellite responses to such emergencies as major fires, industrial disasters, weather events, or possible terrorist attacks.

No one likes to think of such disastrous scenarios, but in the event that something does happen, the more prepared we are, the better the outcome can be.

Photo: New rigs unveiled this month with Mayor Amicone, Commissioner Tony Pagano, and myself.

### Watermelon Boats

The YWCA's 16th annual Celebrity Chefs Benefit, "Men Cooking Helping Build Strong



Leaders in our Youth" event was a great success this weekend!

This year, I chose to make a simple summer fruit salad with a somewhat dramatic presentation in a watermelon boat.

The YWCA does so much good in our community and this event is one way to help them achieve their goals. I encourage everyone who has never been to come next year--I am already looking forward to it.

My goal later in the day was to beat the heat by heading over to the Palisades Boat Club's opening day party which was also packed with people enjoying a leisurely Sunday with tons of great food.

It was heartening to see people swimming in the Hudson--a true testament to environmental awareness having a positive effect on aquatic life.

#### **Leafblower Ban is Now!!!**



We can all breathe easier again this summer now that the City Council unanimously approved Yonkers' gas-powered leaf blower ban which runs June 1 to September 30.

Yonkers joined a growing number of Westchester municipalities to enact leaf blower bans, including Rye, Greenburgh, Scarsdale, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings, and Mamaroneck.

This is good news for Westchester. There are so many health and environmental problems caused by leaf blowers, mainly because they are not held to the same standards as other gas-powered machines, such as cars, so they pollute like crazy. It's reported that they emit as much pollution in an hour as a car would if it drove 100 miles.



They also force harmful ground-level substances to become airborne. Pollen, feces and dust particles as well as particularly dangerous substances like lead, organic carbon, chromium, arsenic, cadmium, nickel and mercury which accumulate along street curbs are blown into the air where they are inhaled, causing health problems. It's also doubtful that anyone will miss the incessant, blaring noise that drowns out the sounds of summer.

Enjoy!

#### Spotlight on Yonkers



Tune into my new TV show, "Spotlight on Yonkers" on Channel 78.

The first show we did is about the leafblower ban and will air for the next two weeks at 9:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. Join me with special guests Jeff Byrne, St. John's Hospital Asthma Program Director; Yonkers parent, Gloria Mirrione; Richard Heller, landscape designer; and Molly Roffman, Green Policy Task Force member.

We are interested in hearing from you with show ideas and interests. Please contact [laura.f.ahrenthold@yonkersny.gov](mailto:laura.f.ahrenthold@yonkersny.gov)

#### Public Meeting Notice

Residents and bus riders can learn more about Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and its possibilities for the Central Avenue corridor by coming to an open house from 5:30 to 8 pm on Monday, June 16 at the Will Library in Yonkers.

The Westchester County Department of Transportation is conducting a study to determine



whether a high capacity rapid transit system could run along one of the county's major commercial strips extending from White Plains at the north end to Yonkers and the New York City subway in the Bronx.

For more information, contact Naomi Klein, Principal Planner, [nk.k3@westchestergov.com](mailto:nk.k3@westchestergov.com) or (914) 813-7758.

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### Relay For Life



My office organized two "City Hall for a Cure" [Relay For Life](#) bake sale fundraisers that literally rolled in the dough.

Thanks to all who baked (and bought!), including Jannine Ferraiola, Debra Censi, Renee Milligan, Tara Renzi, Marie Neumayer, Antonia Laoutaris, Daisy Nunez, John Rubbo, Beth Lesnick and others, we raised \$856 in just eight short hours.

Photo: Interns Corey Koscielniak and Molly Crevey selling the goods.

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### Alexander Street Meeting

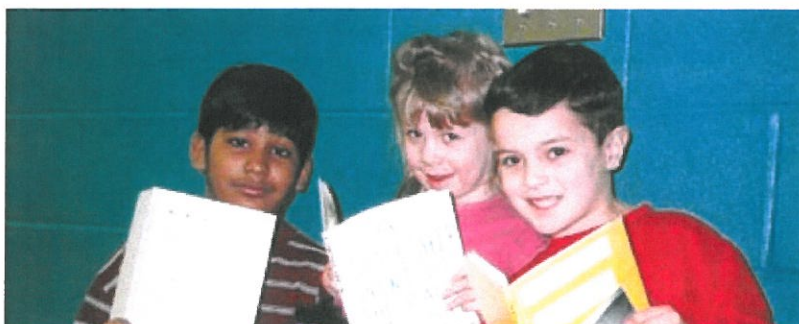


At 4 p.m. on June 25, in the Mayor's City Hall reception room, the Yonkers Community Development Agency will be holding a board meeting on the [Alexander Street Master Plan](#) featuring George Janes from the Environmental Simulation Center and Robert MacFarlane of Homes for America. MacFarlane will present his Point Street development plan to the board.

The meeting is open to the public. For more information, please contact [Daisy Colon](#).

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### SAVE THE DATE



**Book Fair:** Yonkers Partners in Education (PIE) will be sponsoring a bookfair at Barnes & Noble on Central Ave. in Yonkers from June 19-22. School orchestras from Casimir Pulaski School and Family School 29 will play at 7:30 on



opening night. During the three day event, 25% of all book sales will go toward new books for their Family Literacy Campaign which will send new books home with Yonkers Public School children to read with their families to encourage literacy.

**Fair Fun:** The Ukranian Heritage Festival starts tonight and runs through June 15 at St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church Corner of North Broadway and Shonnard Place in Yonkers. Come enjoy traditional dance performances and fabulous food.

**Father's Day:** Don't forget Dad on June 14th!

**Volunteer for Autism:** Sat. June 21 at Murray's Skating Center in Yonkers for [volunteerfriday@frainapalooza](mailto:volunteerfriday@frainapalooza), a day of live music, food, art, raffles and more to raise money for Autism.

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Written by Laura Fahrenthold

email: [chuck.lesnick@yonkersny.gov](mailto:chuck.lesnick@yonkersny.gov)

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